



POSSESSIVE BOSS' CHRISTMAS

AMAZON BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LENA LITTLE

POSSESSIVE BOSS' CHRISTMAS

A POSSESSIVE MAN: BOOK 35

LENA LITTLE



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PREVIEW

It's just another Christmas party, something we do every single year at the casino. Nothing new, nothing special.

Until I see my underling's new secretary.

Daniella...

I'm drawn to her like iron filings to a magnet, and she stirs a hunger I can't satisfy unless I have her.

But when I find out she's working as an undercover cop, my first instinct is to protect her from my men, especially someone who betrayed the family.

There's no question about it.

Daniella belongs to me. To her *Daddy*.

So whoever dares to lay a finger on her will pay.

I will make him.

Even if it's someone I've known for decades and thought of as a friend.

No one touches what's mine and walks away...not without a few broken bones at least.

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The twinkling lights in the room sparkle against the shimmering garland, adorning every available surface.

Paulie's assistant went overboard with the decorations like she does every year, but at this point, it's just tradition. The employees at the casino look forward to this party all year, so we like them to enjoy it while they can.

Christmas music blares through speakers as everyone gathers around the table, tentatively picking up food. I scan the room, looking for Paulie. After the heat we faced over the past few weeks, I need to touch base with him. I turned those detectives' attention away from us long enough, but I know we don't have much longer.

As I look around the room, I see someone and do a double take. What the... I'm certain I've never seen her before in my life. *Fuck, I'd remember seeing a woman like that.* She's exquisite. The room stops moving and the jovial music and murmuring turns silent when I lay eyes on her for the first time. Her honey-blond hair is tied back in a long, thick braid with a red velvet ribbon tied into it. Her eyes are a bright green that seems to glow in the low lighting in the room. My eyes slowly fall down her body, lingering on her plush, pink lips.

My pants tighten as my mind wanders when I look at her legs. All I can think about is wrapping them around me while she screams my name.

"Dominic," someone says behind me. I turn to see who it is and lose track of the mysterious woman for a moment.

“Uncle Gio,” I reply, pulling him in for a quick hug. When we break apart, I look around the room for the woman and she’s nowhere to be seen. For a moment, I think I imagined her. “Have you seen Paulie around here?” I ask, no longer as worried about Paulie as I am about finding the woman.

“He went to his office half an hour ago, said he had something he had to take care of.” Gio shrugs, turning his attention from me to the deli platter on the table.

I nod my head to thank him and leave the event hall. The night is still young, and I still need to make my rounds with everyone before I give my toast. I still have time before any of that will be too late, though, so I head to the elevator.

Paulie’s office is on the fifth floor, directly below mine, which I know he has his own issues with. The elevator dings and I step off, immediately heading to Paulie’s office to catch him there.

Before I even open the door, I see her again. My blood boils when I see Paulie leaning against her desk. He’s moving his hands wildly, and I can tell he’s telling her some kind of joke or story. *Is he flirting with her?*

She’s mine. I can’t have that.

Through the glass door, I see her sitting behind his assistant’s desk, looking up at him with a fake smile plastered on her face. Of course, she has to smile and laugh at his boring stories. I can’t help but wonder what happened to his other assistant, Deanna. She’s been with the casino for decades and was loyal to the family. Did Paulie fire her for the new assistant? Did she retire?

When I open the door, Paulie jumps off the desk and faces me, clearing his throat like I walked in and interrupted something. He looks at me like he had something going on with the woman, but I know it won’t be the case any longer. If he did, she would forget about him as soon as she met me. She’s mine, and I’m going to make sure Paulie knows that.

“What can I do for you, Dom?” Paulie asks me after a moment when he catches me staring at his assistant.

“New assistant?” I ask, nodding to her.

“Y-yes,” Paulie replies, stepping back so she and I both have a good view of each other. She stands up behind her desk and smiles at me, her cheeks flush, and I instantly know she feels the same attraction I do. “This is—”

“I’m Dominic,” I say to her, pushing past Paulie and extending a hand for hers, never once taking my eyes away from her gorgeous face. “You can call me Dom.”

“Daniella,” she replies, nervously laughing. Her voice sounds like a melody when she speaks, and I can’t help myself when I think about how good my name would sound coming out of her mouth. Something about her calls to me in a way no other woman ever has.

Given my status and wealth, there’s no shortage of women who want to be with me. I can hardly walk through the grounds of the casino without someone trying to flirt with me. It takes a lot to get my attention, and Daniella captured it entirely with a single word. It’s unexplainable how I feel, but I know I have to have her.

Paulie clears his throat next to me and a flicker of rage floods through me. Who does he think he is, interrupting us?

“Was there a reason you came to see me?” Paulie asks again. He wants to be alone with Daniella again. I don’t know if he planned on asking her out before I got there, but it sure as hell won’t be happening now.

“Excuse me,” I say to Daniella, finally taking my eyes off her and leading Paulie into his office.

He follows behind me and gestures for me to sit in front of his desk. I close the door behind us, and he nervously fumbles around with his tie. I look through the glass one last time before turning to Paulie to get another look at Daniella. As soon as we aren’t there, she starts typing away on her computer, not focusing on us.

I can hardly pull my eyes away from her because Jesus Christ, she’s magnificent in every way. Even with Paulie sitting across from me, my mind wanders to all the things I like to do with

Daniella. I have to actively force my mind away from it to focus on Paulie.

“I assume you want to talk about the investigation,” Paulie says, taking a seat behind his desk.

I sit down across from him and nod my head, taking a deep breath to try and rein in my thoughts. Still, Daniella lingers in my mind.

“We need to figure out who’s really behind this because I know it isn’t me,” I say, quietly to make sure Daniella can’t hear. “It’s obvious someone is framing me. We have a rat and we need to flush them before something big happens.”

“Any idea who it could be?” Paulie looks over my shoulder at Daniella.

My pulse quickens as the anger rises in my throat. I turn around and see that she’s no longer sitting behind the desk but standing in front of it, facing away from us while unraveling garland from a box.

“What happened to Deanna?” I ask, trying to control the tone of my voice as much as possible.

“Her daughter just had a baby so she’s taking time off to be with her.” He doesn’t take his eyes off Daniella’s ass while she faces away from us. “Can’t say I’m disappointed with the temp the company sent.”

I clench my fists tight enough that my nails dig into the palm of my hand. It stings, but it’s the only thing keeping me from leaping across the desk, grabbing Paulie by his tie, and telling him exactly what I think.

The idea of her sitting across from him while he ogles her all day is infuriating enough that I can feel my blood pressure rising. What if he makes a move on her? The thought of him touching her is almost nauseating.

I stand up and press my hands firmly on the desk in front of him, bending down quite a bit due to my height. Paulie finally tears his eyes away from Daniella and looks up at me with a confused expression. I lean down close to his face so our eyes meet. He needs to see how serious I am.

“I want her,” I tell him in a low voice, unblinking.

Paulie shakes his head and furrows his brow for a moment, looking over my shoulder briefly. “Come on, you can have any woman you want—”

“I want her to *work* for me,” I interrupt. Paulie stares at me for a moment with raised eyebrows, not believing a word I said.

“No way.” He lets out a nervous laugh, looking between me and Daniella.

Before he has a chance to say anything else, I stand upright and quickly reach to grab him by his collar. I yank him out of his chair, pulling him halfway across his desk to meet my eyes. Papers and picture frames with his wife and kids fall to the ground around us.

“I wasn’t asking,” I snarl, clenching my jaw and staring deep into his eyes.

Paulie gulps and nods his head before I set him down. He straightens his collar and walks out of the office to speak to Daniella.

“**Y**ou’re being reassigned,” Paulie says in a hushed voice.

My heart drops. Reassigned? How can that be? I’ve only been working in his office for a day. I hadn’t done anything to give away the real reason I was there. Sergeant Tully is going to be furious with me. The more I let myself think about it, the more worried I get. What if they know about me? What if reassigning me means they’ll try and hurt me?

“I’m not sure I understand,” I say, trying to play dumb and innocent. “Have I done something wrong?”

Paulie opens his mouth to respond, but before he can, Dominic DeLuca walks through his office door and speaks up. “Not at all. Consider this a promotion,” he coolly adds, striding through the room to stand in front of me.

I don’t know what to think about the “promotion”, but being in front of Dominic causes a whirlwind of emotions. He’s more attractive in person than he was in the surveillance footage that was shown to me before being assigned to this case. He’s tall, with broad shoulders and hands large enough to look like he can wrap them around my waist.

His light brown eyes sparkle as he speaks, and he wears a charming half-smile as he brushes a strand of black hair away from his eyes. I oddly feel excited being in his presence, and it’s a feeling almost foreign to me. At twenty years old, I’ve never even kissed a man before. Suddenly, my chest swells and my throat goes dry when I see Dominic.

“What have I done to deserve that?” I ask him, genuinely curious about his sudden interest in me.

“I took a look at your resume and feel you’d be better suited as my assistant.”

I know it’s a lie. I don’t have a resume on file here. Sergeant Tully managed to get me assigned here through a temp agency that’s worked with the VICE team a few times. They sent me a letter of recommendation and a list of skills that I possessed applicable to what Paulie needed. Dominic is lying about why he wants me to work for him, and I don’t know why.

As curious as I am, I’m just as worried. I’m here on business unrelated to anything they think. Someone in the DeLuca crime family killed one of our own, and we’re looking for justice. If any of them find out I’m a cop, I’m done for.

Even though I’m worried, I can’t help but feel impressed with myself. Whatever the reason was, I’m being invited to work for Dominic DeLuca. He’s our main suspect and the leader of the family. I was assigned to work with Paulie because I’m a rookie. Everyone thought it would be easier for me. Now, I’m going to prove all of them wrong.

“If you’ll just gather your things, I can take you upstairs to your new office,” Dominic says.

All I brought with me in the morning was my purse and a lunchbox, so I grab both of those and follow him to the elevator. A mixture of nerves and excitement confuses me while I follow him. I’m retreating into my head, unable to stop wondering why he wants me to work for him. If there is any chance he knows who I am or why I’m really here, joining him on the elevator could be a death sentence.

And yet, I follow him anyway.

It’s hard to tell if it’s ambition, stupidity, or something else altogether. Everything I know about Dominic DeLuca is telling me I should leave, but actually standing in his presence is disarming. I should be nervous. I should be afraid of someone like him, but I’m not. It’s the strangest feeling, but I’m calm around him.

When he looks at me, there's a fire in his eyes that my body responds to. I try to brush the feelings aside because they're so wrong. He's a criminal and a powerful one at that. He's a criminal, yet I'm instantly attracted to him. I don't know what to make of it.

Dominic is notorious in the department, and I remember other officers telling me stories about times they tried and failed to bring him in. His reach is long, and it spread into every level of our judicial system. There's a reason none of the Dons from the DeLuca family have ever been charged. Money can fix a lot of problems, and the DeLucas had no shortage of that.

Both of us stand on the elevator together while we ride up to Dominic's floor. It's a short ride, but while I'm looking ahead, I catch a glimpse of him in the reflection on the door staring at me. His eyes climb over my body—starting from my legs to the back of my head. My whole body warms at the attention, almost feeling the way his eyes are caressing me. I soak in the feeling, savoring the idea that someone like Dominic could be attracted to me.

The elevator doors open and Dominic gestures for me to walk ahead of him. His eyes have been glued to me, and I like it more than I should. Normally, I feel uncomfortable getting attention like this from men. There have been a few guys at the department who have tried to take me out, but I always turn them down.

I wanted to become a cop because of my father. I never actually got to meet him since he died while my mother was pregnant with me. All my life I've heard stories about how heroic he was. I idolized him and even slept with a picture of him in uniform by my bed my entire life. Being a cop and following in his footsteps has been my dream for as long as I can remember.

Throwing away my dream for some guy at the station isn't an option. It's hard enough to earn the respect of the men in my department, I can't risk throwing away my reputation. However, within minutes of meeting Dominic, I start to question all of that. My body goes haywire when he's around, and it throws me. I like it, but I'm not used to it.

“Your desk is right here,” he says, leading me across the large room to his office. There’s one round desk in the center of the room, with plants and flowers lined up on the side along with picture frames of young children and family portraits. On top of that, there are bags under the desk belonging to someone else. It’s obvious that somebody works here.

“Thank you,” I say, not wanting to bring up my concern and fuss over it.

I take my seat behind the desk and wait for further instructions from Dominic. His eyes are still on me, that same glimmer is inside of them as he watches me. I’m more aware of every breath I take than I’ve ever been in my life. Dominic can’t take his eyes off me, and I suddenly realize exactly why he pulled me from Paulie’s office.

He wants me to work for him because he’s attracted to me, and I can’t deny that I feel the same way about him. It makes me nervous nonetheless. Regardless of how I feel, the opportunity to get information out of him is too good to pass up.

Dominic might not know it just yet, but this little promotion would be his undoing.

Daniella is a mystery to me and one that I can't wait to unravel.

Looking at her is a treat in itself, but seeing her reaction to me is intoxicating. I know this attraction is mutual—the thickness in the air, the electricity zapping through the space between us. Her body language gives away everything she's feeling. Not only have I grown up in a casino, I've been raised around criminals. No one can read another person's tells better than me.

"I'll just give you a quick rundown of what you're supposed to do," I say to her, walking around the desk to lean over her shoulder while I train her.

Her body tenses as I move closer. My hand rests on the back of the chair, softly brushing up against her back every time she moves. Her soft hair tickles the back of my hand, and my mind instantly trails away from the training. For a moment, all I can think about is bending her over the desk and pulling her hair while I make her scream my name over and over.

Daniella leans back for a moment while I'm looking down at her, and I get a clear view down her shirt. Holy fuck. Fires light along my nerve endings, and my cock strains against the zipper of my pants. I can just make out the color of the bra she's wearing and a clear visual comes to the forefront of my mind. She catches me staring and holds my gaze instead of calling me out. If I didn't know any better, I would think she likes me looking.

“I think I have the hang of it,” she says with a smile, still staring up at me.

I nod to her and reluctantly pull myself away to go back to my office. Luckily for me, the walls of my office are glass so I can look over them and catch glimpses of her whenever I please. I thought the view of the city skyline was impressive before Daniella was sitting within my sight.

My computer dings, and I tear my eyes off Daniella and look to see what it is. I had left Paulie’s office in such a hurry that I never had a chance to discuss the reason I went there in the first place. The messages are all from him, asking me why I went to see him. There’s an annoyance in the tone that bothers me. I know he’s probably upset about what happened, but it isn’t his job to talk back to me.

I respond to his messages by telling him we’ll talk soon, but he urges me to message him instead by claiming he doesn’t have time to wait. Paulie has all the time in the world to wait. I pay him well enough to be available for me when I need to talk to him. I don’t respond to his messages. In my line of work, we don’t leave a paper trail like that. He should know better.

A light knock on my door grabs my attention, and I look up to see Daniella slowly opening it and peeking her head in.

“Mr. DeLuca—” she begins, her soft voice just a nervous whisper.

“Just call me Dom, please.”

“Okay, Dom.” She smiles as she says my name. “I was wondering if it would be alright for me to go back down to the party?”

The party. I’ve forgotten all about it since seeing her for the first time. The annual holiday party had been a tradition at the casino since my father was in charge of it. The staff looks forward to it every year, and as part of the tradition, I’m supposed to give a toast.

I need to go back to the party myself, but I want to stay in my office alone with Daniella just a little longer. Getting to look at her, with no one else around like she was on display just for

me, is exciting. Now that she's standing in front of me, my eyes linger on her legs. I'm not making any attempt to hide my gaze. Daniella can see as clear as day that I'm admiring her body, and she's not doing anything about it.

"Of course, but before you go..." I say, calling her over to me. She walks right over and stands in front of my desk. "Do you know how to add a function in a spreadsheet?"

"I think so." She scrunches her eyebrows and purses her plush lips as she speaks.

"Would you mind showing me?"

She smiles and walks around the desk to access my computer. I roll back a few inches in my chair, not standing up to let her take the seat. She leans forward on the desk and starts working. I know how to add a function to a spreadsheet, it's a very basic thing to do. Instead of watching her stumble her way through explaining it, I focus on her ass right in front of me.

Daniella is curvy in all the right places. The skirt she's wearing is tight enough to accentuate all of them. All I can think about is ripping it off her and pulling her into my lap, feeling her soft body up against mine. I'm so carried away in my thoughts that I almost reach out to touch her, but I stop myself.

When she's done showing me how to add a function, she turns around and asks me if I got it. She has to ask me twice before I am focused enough to answer her. Just thinking about her makes me hard, and it's noticeable. She notices the bulge in my pants and her eyes hold on to it for a moment before she looks back at me, with bright pink cheeks.

"Thank you, Daniella," I say, leaning back in the chair, not ashamed of how I've reacted to her. "Enjoy the party."

She says goodbye and walks out of my office. I watch her leave, rubbing the palms of her hands on her black skirt as she moves farther away from me. I think about walking up behind her, pulling her hair to the side, kissing the silky smooth skin

on her neck, and hearing the gentle moans escape her throat while my hand grips it.

As soon as she steps on the elevator, I unbutton my pants and pleasure myself to the thought of her. I've been turned on since the first moment I laid eyes on her, and the frustration is becoming too much.

When I finish, I wash my hands and head back to the party.

It's still in full swing when I arrive. It's almost like I never even left. Employees and family members stop me to thank me for their bonuses and make small talk about holiday plans, but I brush past all of them as quickly as possible. I want to give Daniella space at the party, but I want to make sure she's in sight.

I watch her mingle with some of the women in the office. They laugh and help themselves to the drinks on the table. She seems to be integrating herself well, which is a relief. I can only hope the other women warn her about what men to stay away from. One of the hazards of working in my line of work is the shady people you can wind up around. I don't like to associate myself with people who would hurt an innocent person, especially women or children. But there are a few people who I've unfortunately not been able to get rid of. Getting them out of the family would mean they could potentially end up working as an informant against us. I can't risk that.

Paulie walks into the party after about half an hour, and it catches my attention long enough for me to lose track of Daniella again. He sees me staring at him and approaches me. Any annoyance or frustration he feels is hidden behind a big, fake smile. We're in front of everyone else in the business. They can't see any signs of animosity between us.

"Can we talk?" he asks me, nodding his head to the side exit in the room for us to sneak out of.

"I'd love to, Paulie, but it's about time for my toast," I say before I slip away from him and make my way to the small stage erected at the end of the room. Truthfully, I do need to talk to him. But there's a time and a place for the discussion

we need to have, and it isn't right here. The suggestion itself annoys me, so leaving is the best option for me anyway.

I tap on the microphone a few times to get everyone's attention. While I'm above everyone, I scan the room looking for Daniella. I don't see her right away and feel myself getting nervous. I convince myself that she's just in the restroom or out of the room or a phone call.

"Thank you all for coming out here today," I begin my toast, raising my glass high for everyone to do the same. There is a long pause while the kitchen door opens and Daniella walks through it with a tray of food, apparently helping one of the servers. "It's been an incredible year for us, and I have all of you to thank for it. I couldn't have asked for a better team to help me run this place. As you all know, I've grown up here and I've known most of you since I was a baby, and I'm happy all of us could see the success together. All of you are my family, and I'm proud of each and every one of you. It means the world to me that all of you support me when times are tough, but I know that we can get through anything together. So here's a toast to family, friendship, and all of our success!"

I flip the switch on the mic and everyone in the room goes back to what they were doing before I interrupted them. Daniella walks back to the kitchen, carrying a few empty trays. I don't see a server she's helping, so I wonder if she's just cleaning up on her own. But then I notice the last person I want to see near her. Tyler. He's an enforcer, someone we use as muscle frequently. There's always been something about him that rubbed me the wrong way. Unfortunately, being the leader of a crime family means being forced to keep the company of some bad people. If I do confront him, I could have a rat on my hands.

Tyler follows Daniella into the kitchen, and without giving it a second thought, I jump off the stage and make my way there.

DANIELLA

I've always felt overwhelmed at parties.

I love the idea of them, especially holiday parties, but the crowds of people and commotion bring up unpleasant memories. Now that I'm here undercover, my paranoia has gotten the better of me. I'm alone, surrounded by people who have possibly committed heinous crimes in the past. My job is to get evidence against them. If one of them has any clue who I am, my life could be on the line.

I almost didn't go back down. I just thought it would look a little suspicious if I distanced myself so much from the other coworkers so soon after arriving. People keep introducing themselves to me, and I already know who most of them are thanks to the studying I did before arriving, but I have a hard time focusing.

All I can think about is what happened in the office before I left. Dominic made no attempts to hide how he felt. I've never seen a man react to me that way before. My head is still spinning, and I feel like I'm permanently blushing. I like it. While I was there, standing in front of him, I wanted more.

Dominic promoted me because he's drawn to me, and I can exploit that to get what I'm looking for. I feel bad for even thinking that. It feels wrong to deceive someone that way, but I'm here on a mission and I have to keep that in mind.

That's why I slip away to the kitchen. I scope it out before going in. Thankfully, all the cooks are too busy to notice me. After that, I just grab some old trays to use as an excuse to go

back. I need to send a quick message to my sergeant, letting him know what's happened. I'm confident in my skills, but I'm in over my head. Working for Dominic is not what I was sent here to do.

The cooks don't notice me slipping through the side door. The air is chilly, and I want to go back inside as soon as possible, so I pull out my phone and type a quick message to my sergeant. I manage to send off the text message when someone walks through the door behind me.

"Texting your boyfriend?" he says. It's not a voice I'm familiar with at all, but when I turn around, I recognize him instantly. Tyler Fredericks. Our informant told us that he goes by the nickname Brick sometimes. As he walks up to me, I can see why.

He's huge. His shoulders are broad, and his neck is thick enough that I don't think I'd be able to wrap both hands around it if I tried. With the look in his eyes and the fact that we're both standing outside in an alley alone, I get an unsettling feeling in my stomach. I'm already mentally running through all the ways to fight him off.

"No." I laugh, quickly putting my phone in my pocket so he can't see what message I've sent. "My dad is sick and I just like to check in on him when I can."

Before starting today, my sergeant had me study everything I could about the DeLuca family and their underlings. I know all too well what Tyler is capable of, and I know I need to get inside. I've taken countless self-defense classes, both personally and professionally. If it comes down to it, I might be able to fight him off, but it would leave him wondering where I learned to fight so well. As much experience I have fighting, he easily outweighs me by 200 pounds and is just as skilled in fighting.

"I'm sorry to hear that," he says in a flat voice. "You didn't need to come out here to talk to him. It's cold, and a girl like you shouldn't be in places like this."

"Well, I was just about to head back inside," I nervously say, shivering both from the cold and the fear.

I offer a polite smile to avoid setting him off, and I try to walk by him to the door. To my surprise, he lets me. I exhale a breath of relief and reach for the door, happy that I'd just been overthinking before.

My heart plummets when I realize the door is locked.

I stare at the handle for a moment, watching Tyler from my peripheral vision as he turns around and crosses his arms. I gulp and take a deep breath before turning to him. He has something planned, and I know I'm going to have to fight my way out of this. I think about all of the officers in my department who told me I'll never be able to live up to my father's shadow, or that I don't have what it takes to do this. Proving them wrong is all I want to do. I can't let that end here.

I turn to face Tyler and a sinister smile forms on his lips. I swear I can hear a dark chuckle escaping his throat. I think of my options, evaluating everything around me as quickly as I can. There are old shipping crates, a thick glass ashtray, and several garbage bags around me. The ashtray might do some damage if I can land a blow to his head. The end of the alley is roughly a hundred feet away. I'm fast, I run every day. I run marathons. Tyler clearly works out, but can he keep up with me?

I decide running is my best option. So, I take off. I try to run around Tyler, but the moment I'm within his grasp, he catches me. He grabs me by my shoulders and pulls me close to him. I struggle in his arms, trying to wiggle my way out of them, but they're too strong.

"Where are you going?" Tyler laughs, turning me around in his arms, gripping my shoulders tight enough that I can feel a bruise already forming. "I just want to get to know you a little better."

He lifts me as if I'm as light as a feather and pins me against the wall near the door. I cry out, desperately hoping someone will hear me, but he covers my mouth with his hand. He laughs at me while tears run down my face. My heart is racing,

and I'm thinking of everything I can do to get out of this situation alive.

He brings his face closer to mine, and I bite down on his finger. Hard. I can taste the metallic tang of his blood after he drops me to the ground and yells.

"You bitch!" he groans while he waves his hand in the air.

I try to scramble to my feet, but he's too quick. He grabs me again and forces me to look at him. A scowl has taken the place of the evil smile he had before. He's angry and his eyes are filled with malice.

Suddenly, the side door slams open, and he turns his head away from me, quickly letting go of me. He straightens his back and hides the hand I bit behind him. Dominic stands in front of the door and glares at Tyler.

"What the hell are you doing?" he asks Tyler, quickly walking forward and standing in front of him.

Tyler is larger than him—the guy's larger than most people—but he cowers in Dominic's presence. I can't tell if he's afraid because Dominic is his boss or if it's something else. Something tells me he has more reasons to be afraid of Dominic than I know about. Nevertheless, I'm happy Dominic showed up when he did. He's a criminal and I know that, but I feel safe with him here.

"We were just having a chat," Tyler says, trying to lie, probably hoping I'd be too afraid to disagree.

I don't say anything. Instead, Dominic looks at me, sees the fear in my eyes, and pushes Tyler up against the wall. Tyler tries to fight back, but Dominic hits him and knocks the wind out of him.

"Didn't look like talking to me," Dominic says through gritted teeth. "Daniella, go inside."

I rush to the door and open it, standing on the threshold for a moment, looking back. Dominic doesn't need to look back to know I'm still there.

“Go now!” he commands and I quickly close the door and back away.

My blood runs so hotly through my body that I hardly feel the chill of the winter air.

Tyler is pinned to the wall, and I press my forearm against his neck. He's gasping for air and shaking his head to tell me to stop. I'm not going to kill him even if I could. Trust me, I want to. But I won't.

When Tyler's face is purple, I drop my arm and back away from him. He falls to the ground, gasping for breath as he coughs and sits on the ground on his hands and knees. I thought I would leave it there, but I couldn't. His hands were on Daniella. He touched *my* woman. He could have hurt her. Hell, he probably scarred her for life. He isn't going to get away with it this easily.

He catches his breath and looks up at me before slowly starting to make his way to his feet. Before he can, I kick him in the side and he falls back down with a groan.

"It's not what—" he starts saying before I kick him again. He rolls over onto his side and winces from the pain.

Yes, Tyler is twice my size. But he won't fight back against me. He knows better than that. Just like he should have known better than to corner my woman in an alley. Besides, just because he's bigger doesn't mean he's stronger.

"I don't ever want to see you touch her again," I seethe at him, holding back a slew of curses I want to send his way. "You don't look at her, you don't think about her, you don't breathe

the wrong way when she's around. If she walks into a room, you will look away and leave. Do you understand?"

Tyler doesn't say anything. His nostrils flare, and he's gritting his teeth. He's known for being a hothead, temperamental, unable to control his anger. I'm provoking him and I know that. So fucking what. I almost wish he'd give me another reason to do more to him.

I move to stand over him, gripping the collar of his shirt and lifting him to face me. He still doesn't say anything, so I punch him in the face.

"I said, do you understand me?" I yell at him again.

"Yes," he groans, holding his cheek where my punch landed.

I drop his collar by shoving him into the ground. "Get the hell out of here. I don't want to look at you."

I don't turn to watch him leave, but I can hear him hurriedly walking down the alley while I make my way to the door. My hand is throbbing and I can feel blood trickling through my fingers from the broken skin.

Daniella is standing near the door with a worried look when I open it. She holds her breath, expecting to see Tyler walk in behind me, but is relieved when he doesn't. Seeing her fear again makes me want to chase Tyler down and kill him.

"Did he hurt you?" she asks me, looking down at my hand.

I look at it for a second and shake my head. "Don't worry about me. Are you alright? Did he do anything to hurt you?"

She looks down at her feet for a moment and shakes her head. I can't imagine what's running through her mind right now. It takes all of my self-control not to go back and finish that asshole off.

"I saw a first aid kit on the desk upstairs," she says instead of answering me. "I'll help you get that cleaned up."

I don't want to push her, so I follow her to the elevator. Daniella walks through the party with her head down, not wanting to draw any attention to either of us. My hand is

throbbing, so I hold it with my other hand while we walk. I see a few people's eyes fall on it, but they don't say anything.

Someone tried to hurt Daniella, and I taught them a lesson. Everyone else needs to know what happens if they try anything.

Back in my office, Daniella ushers me to take a seat behind her desk while she digs through the drawers for the first aid kit. When she finds it, she takes my hand and gently dabs the wound with a cloth. Looking at her face up close, her eyes are puffy, with streaks of dried tears on her cheeks.

Something roars in me. Something feral, primal. A deep desire to protect her and make sure no one ever hurts or upsets her.

"Thank you," she says after a while, still not looking up to face me. "If you hadn't shown up when you did..."

Her voice cracks as she thinks about what might have happened. She focuses on wrapping my knuckles with gauze and medical tape.

"I'm sorry that happened." I try and pull her attention away from it. "I'm glad I got there before it was more serious. I promise you that I dealt with him. He's not going to be a problem for you ever again."

"I can see that." She laughs, gesturing to my hand. "I just can't thank you enough. I wish I had some way to make this up to you."

"Don't worry about it," I say, pulling my newly wrapped hand away from her. "Why don't you head home for the day? We can finish training tomorrow."

I thank her for fixing up my hand and go into my office. I watch over my computer screen as she gathers her things and leaves. Part of me thinks she might not come back tomorrow. My heart races at the idea of not seeing her again, but her information is on file with us. If she chooses not to come back, I can always go to her. Because there's no way I'm letting her go. No fucking way.

I don't go back down to the party when she leaves. After what happened, it feels wrong to go down there and celebrate when

something traumatic happened to Daniella. I've known her for a few hours, but I care for her. It's unexplainable but she is different from any woman I've ever met. She's *my* woman.

My focus is back on the investigation. Someone in the family killed an officer, and I don't even know who it was. What makes the crime even worse is the fact that whoever did it is obviously trying to frame me. There's a rat in the family, and I need to find out who they are.

My phone rings, and I look down to see who's calling me. I smile and answer the phone, thinking about how timely of a call that was.

"Dominic DeLuca," I say when I answer.

"Yeah, I know. I called you dumb ass," Mike Herrero says on the other end. Normally, I wouldn't take a comment like that well, but I make an exception for Mike. He's one of my oldest friends and the sole reason I'm not behind bars. "I have something new you're gonna want to hear about."

"Can you meet me tonight?" I ask him, hopeful that he'll bring me the break in the case I need.

"Eight o'clock. You know where to meet me," he says before hanging up the phone.

MIKE and I have always met at a little hole-in-the-wall restaurant I bought out a few years ago. It's not the kind of place anybody would expect me to be hanging around. As much of a nuisance as it is, I know there's almost always some form of police surveillance on my homes, so meeting there isn't an option.

Because Mike is a cop, we can't meet at his place either.

I'm glad he has something for me. I've been waiting for what feels like weeks to figure out exactly what evidence they have against me. The cop who was killed, a man named Daniel Leonard, was a senior officer on the force. He'd been investigating the family for years. In fact, his professional

career was dedicated to us. He was a threat to us, but I was never afraid of him. We have enough men on the inside that we can get out of anything with ease. I didn't have any reason to harm him. Yet, supposedly my DNA was found at the crime scene alongside wool fibers from a coat I own.

I know I was set up, but finding out who did it and why is my top priority. I hope Mike has some of those answers for me.

When I get to the restaurant, he isn't anywhere in sight. It isn't unusual for him to be late since he gets held up at the office quite often. Because of Mike's line of work, the risk of him being found out is high. That's why I pay him well and make sure he's taken care of. However, I'm hardwired to not fully trust anyone.

My Uncle Gio has been working for decades and is an intimidating man to look at. I always bring him along to check for wires and make sure Mike doesn't step out of line.

We order some food and wait for Mike to arrive. After about fifteen minutes, he shows up.

I offer him a menu before he takes his seat, but he shakes his head and slides into the booth across from me.

"I can't stay long," he says. "Wife's waiting for me at home."

Mike opens his bag, pulls out a manila envelope, and slides it across the table to me. I wrinkle my brow at it. He never mentioned anything about giving me something over the phone.

"I overheard some of the guys from VICE talking about an undercover operation," he begins, speaking very fast. "They didn't say much about it. It was all pretty hush-hush. There have been internal investigations in the force for a while, and they don't know who to trust. But they trusted me and here we are. They have someone working inside the casino."

I don't say anything right away. Instead, I open the envelope to see who it is. The contents are neatly organized, put together with a small paperclip in the corner. At the very top of the file is a picture of a woman I instantly recognize as Daniella.

DANIELLA

I walk in the door to my apartment and pull up my phone to see who just called me.

During the car ride back to my apartment, it was hard to focus on anything other than what just happened. The severity of the risk I'm taking is clearer to me now than it's ever been. Yes, I feel safe around Dominic even though he's the leader of the DeLuca family. But that's one person, and I can't count on him always being around me. I'm spending my days surrounded by other criminals, and that's scary.

My sergeant sent me a text message asking me to stop by the station when I was done working, but I responded by telling him that I couldn't. Instead of going tonight, I plan on going in early to talk to him. With everything I've been through this afternoon, I just want to be alone and unwind.

I run a nice warm bath for myself, adding in some of the bubbles that my cousin gifted me for my birthday last year. I don't normally have the time to relax like this, but I need it today. The water cradles me as I slide inside of it, and without thinking, I close my eyes.

My mind subconsciously carries me back to Dominic. I'm with him in the elevator again. This time, it breaks down. I start frantically pressing all of the buttons, trying to get the elevator working. There's this tension in the air, and I can't tell if I'm nervous about Dominic because of who he is or how he makes me feel. When I realize there isn't going to be anything

to help the situation, I turn around and see Dominic staring at me.

Without saying anything, he takes a step forward and holds my chin between his thumb and index finger, tilting it up to face him. His lips fall on mine and every cell in my body is hot. My stomach tingles and I feel sensations that I normally don't between my legs.

His hands fall on my body, lingering for a moment at the bottom of my shirt, silently asking me for permission to explore further. I nod at him, giving him the go-ahead to touch me. All I want is for him to touch me. Dominic's big, strong hands slowly climb up my body. The anticipation is in my throat as I wait for him to touch the sensitive skin of my breasts.

Before he gets there, I open my eyes.

The excitement lingers between my legs, and I feel ashamed. Of all the men I could be attracted to, it had to be Dominic DeLuca. Even though I question myself about it, I wish I stayed asleep a little bit longer. Nothing could ever happen between us in the real world, so what's the harm in letting myself have what I want in my dreams?

My fingers are all pruney and the water is starting to get cold, so I climb out of the tub and towel off before making my way to bed. There's a part of me that wishes the dream I had in the tub will find me again.

MY SHIFT at the casino starts at 10:00 in the morning, so I need to be at the station long before then. Working this undercover job is going to be exhausting, but if it's what I have to do to prove to these other officers that I am capable of great things, so be it.

I let myself into Sergeant Tully's office to wait for him, expecting him to arrive pretty early. Time passes and I stare at the clock behind his desk, waiting for him to show up.

Eventually, when I only have 30 minutes to talk to him before I have to leave for my fake job, he shows up.

“How the hell did you wind up working for Dominic?” he asks me after he settles in.

“I’m honestly not sure,” I say, shrugging my shoulders. Tully looks at me and raises his eyebrows, pointing to my clothes with his eyes. The guys at the station aren’t used to seeing me out of uniform. That’s part of the reason I love wearing the uniform, it hides my body. I don’t get as much reaction from men as I do out of the uniform. My office clothes are well-fitting, but they’re not too revealing. “So he might be attracted to me. If it’ll help me get close enough to get the info we need, I’m fine with it.”

“I don’t like this,” Tully says with a long sigh. “Your father would kill me if he knew I was letting you do this. He knew how dangerous the DeLucas were.”

“Well, he’s not here to stop me,” I quickly reply. I’m doing this to try to live up to my father’s name. I can’t risk being taken off this job. I don’t want to be shelved and put on a boring, safe beat just because people are afraid of what my father would think if he was alive. “I’m not leaving. So you should stop worrying and just tell me what to do now that the plan has changed.”

He sighs and nods his head, leaning back in his chair and reluctantly agreeing with me. Everything I’ve heard about my father has been positive. Everybody always tells me that he was ambitious and ruthless when it came to getting what he needed in a case. They joked about him and said that he was like a bloodhound when it came to a case. I can only hope Tully sees some of that in me.

The original plan with me working at the casino was to get close to Paulie. Paulie has been Dominic’s right-hand man for years. Initially, we didn’t think that it would be possible for me to even get near Dominic—otherwise, we would have started there. The truth is, getting the information from Paulie would be a lot easier. There has to be something that Paulie has against Dominic that might corroborate the story we’ve been

building against him. Now, I have to get close to the leader of a crime family and somehow find a way to access confidential documents or get him to confess the crime to me. All the while, I will be hiding the fact that I'm an undercover agent and anything he says to me will be used against him in a court of law.

Tully's advice for me is to play it cool today and not do anything that's going to raise suspicion about who I am. Just do my temp work. Be friendly and charming, maybe flirt with Dominic a little bit if I have to. We don't have time before I go to the casino to develop a thorough plan, but I have to go back after my shift to figure that out.

So, I try to do just that.

When I arrive at the casino, I take the elevator up to the offices like I did the day before. There are two different elevators in the building. The reason for that is so casino patrons don't make their way up to the CEO's office by mistake. The first elevator takes you to the reception area of the offices. The second elevator leads you to the other floors belonging to employees of the casino.

As soon as I step off the elevator, I feel like there are eyes on me. Not everyone is looking, but I can't shake the feeling that I'm unwelcome. Perhaps that's just my own paranoia, though. Getting found out is my biggest worry right now, but I don't think anybody has a reason to suspect me of anything.

The receptionist stops me and asks me how I've enjoyed working in the office so far, and we chat for a few minutes about the party. The party is a sensitive topic for me, given everything that happened with Tyler. Nobody knows about that other than Tyler, Dominic, and me. I don't want to make a big deal out of it, so I don't mention anything to her. If I do, people will be questioning why I'm still there. It only makes sense that a temp would quit after something like that happened to them. I can't risk that suspicion.

I head up to the floor where Dominic's office is and get ready to settle in for the day. From the calendar I read the day before,

Dominic was supposed to be in around 11:00, so seeing him in the office when I arrive is surprising.

Dominic is standing in front of his desk, facing the door, and talking to a shorter, stocky man who I don't recognize right away because he's facing away from me. Dominic looks over the man's shoulders briefly at me but doesn't acknowledge me in any other way. My cheeks feel hot as the memory of the dream I had in the bathtub resurfaces. It almost feels like he can tell I thought of him that way.

The man in front of him is flailing his arms wildly as he speaks. I try to listen to what he's saying, but the soundproofing in the office is far too good. I make a mental note to possibly get some kind of sound recorder into Dominic's office.

I busy myself behind the desk, pretending like I'm not paying attention to what's happening, but I keep a close eye on it. Eventually, the man turns around and storms out of the office. As he's leaving, I get a good look at his face and recognize him. He's Dominic's uncle, Giovanni, and he's been working with the family for decades. He's one of the higher-ups in the DeLuca family, though he's never been very influential. Giovanni is actually one of the few DeLuca family members with criminal records. He's been brought in several times for assaults and racketeering. He's a fall guy.

I smile at him politely as he stares at me, as if I am just doing my job. Our gazes meet, and there's no kindness in his. He lowers his eyes to glare at me and speeds up as he walks by. I watch him walk away and stand by the elevator, looking over his shoulder at me one last time.

My gut feeling is telling me that he knows. I don't feel like I can brush off his reaction to seeing me. They know who I am.

Why did I have to open the envelope with Gio right there?

I know how hot-headed he can be and how protective he is of the family's secrets. I never thought the officer would be her. Part of me feels betrayed that she lied to me about who she is. My brain tells me that she can't be trusted and that I should do something to get rid of her, as I would any other person who tried to spy on the family. But I can't do that.

I need to protect her. Gio knows who she is, and I can only keep him from telling others for so long. I think I managed to convince him that I would take care of it, but when he sees that I haven't, he's going to start talking. Daniella is potentially in danger here. I can't let anything happen to her.

A few minutes after Gio leaves, she knocks on my door and I motion for her to come in.

"Is there anything you need me to do today?" she politely asks, standing right in front of my desk with her arms behind her back.

It's hard not to notice that her blouse has an extra undone button today and her skirt is just a little bit shorter. She wants me to look at her, and I know now that she wants to take advantage of my attraction to her. I don't know how far she's willing to take it, but she's undercover and here on a mission. I have to be careful about what I say around her.

I tried telling Gio that she could be helpful to us. I know for a fact I'm innocent of killing that police officer, and she's here

to prove I'm guilty. I could use her help to prove my innocence. The more she investigates, the more she'll realize that I was framed. There's some kind of rat in the family, and she could help me smoke them out.

Gio thinks it's too risky, but he's not in charge of the family. I am. I think Daniella is my best bet at finding whoever is trying to send me away.

I think about it for a moment, wondering what I should do. The longer she's here in the office, Gio is going to start worrying, despite anything I've said to try and comfort him. But if I can get her out of the office, I might be able to assuage some of his concerns.

"I'm actually going to be at home today. I just stopped in to talk to Gio," I say, standing up and grabbing my briefcase. "I have a contractor coming to do some work. I do need a hand handling some stuff there. You can come along with me."

Daniella hesitates for a moment before responding. She blinks rapidly and chews on her bottom lip. After all, I am a criminal she's investigating, and I've just asked her to leave the place she's supposed to be and come to a private location with me. I would be nervous if I were her.

"Of course," she finally says, her voice slightly higher than before.

She grabs a few things she came in with, and we both head down to the parking garage to my car. I open the car door for her, and she smiles at me before getting in, holding the smile on her face until I join her in the car.

"Tell me about yourself," I say when I pull out of the garage.

"There's not much to say really," she replies with a laugh. I know she's nervous about stumbling and saying something about her personal life that might clue me into her being a cop.

"Come on, that can't be true. Any hobbies? Interests?"

"I don't have time to do much outside of work," she says and I believe her. Being a cop is tough. It's a lifestyle choice. "Aside from temping for you, I work part-time at a dental office as a receptionist."

I watch her in the rearview mirror as she speaks, taking a mental note of her tells while she lies. She can't tell me the truth, but the more I know about how she lies, the more information I can get from her without her even knowing.

“What dentist? Is it around here? Mine just closed down and I need to find a new one,” I say, lying right back to her.

I watch her eyes dart back and forth as she scrambles to come up with an answer. “Dr. Denish. They're actually about half an hour away. They're a small practice, mostly preventative care. What about you?”

I try to hide the half smile that forms on my face as she quickly tries to turn the attention from her to me. It's clear that she hasn't been on the force very long. She isn't a good enough liar, and some of the tactics she's using are common interview tactics. If I had to guess, she just graduated from the police academy and this undercover job is her big break. As long as she's helping me without even knowing, I will help her get that. We both want the same thing.

“I work a lot,” I tell her, which isn't a lie. I'm sure she knows almost everything about me. Where I like to eat, where I take my clothes for dry cleaning, how many hours a day I work—you name it. “When I'm not working, I like to go out on my boat and spend some time on the lake.”

“That sounds lovely,” she says with a smile. There's a moment of silence between us while I focus on driving and she tries to think of things she can say without blowing her cover. “Why did you really promote me yesterday?” she eventually asks.

“What? You don't think you're qualified?” I reply, looking at her with a smile. She bites her lower lip as she meets my eyes before I turn to the road again.

“I was barely qualified to work for Paulie.” She laughs.

“You make it seem like I'm gonna have you engineering a rocket or something,” I say, making her laugh. It sounds sweet and melodic—all I want to hear. “To tell you the truth, I'm probably going to have you help me find Christmas

decorations and put them up today. You're probably overqualified for that."

"Really?" She raises her brows at me. I turn to her and nod my head. It's the truth. I just needed to get her out of the office.

"My neighborhood has a light show every year and my lights are always lackluster." I shrug my shoulders. "I never have the time to put on the grand displays the other people in my neighborhood do. That's going to change this year."

We arrive at my house, and her eyes widen when she sees it. I lead her through the front door and give her a quick tour of everything. She comments on the decorations and marvels at how luxurious all of it is. Truth be told, every time we walk through a room, all I can think about is tearing her clothes off and tossing them on the ground. I avoid showing her my bedroom for that very reason.

I lead her into the living room where she takes a seat and waits while I retrieve the ancient boxes of holiday decorations I have in the basement. I bring them back down to her and both of us sit on the floor and start going through them.

"These are all so old," she says, delicately removing ornaments from the newspaper protecting them in the box.

"A lot of these have been in my family for generations," I tell her, picking up an old glass snowflake covered in silver frost. "Growing up, every year, my mom would buy one new ornament, but the tree would be decorated with all the old ones. It was like a museum of past Christmases."

"We never did anything like that. I never really had any Christmas traditions growing up." She looks down at the ornaments with a smile. "My father died before I was born and my mom had to work hard to provide for me. She refused to get any kind of assistance from the government, so she worked two jobs and hardly had time to spend with me. So Christmas was never a big deal."

"That must have been hard growing up."

"It was, but then, I got older and decided that I wanted Christmas." She laughs, turning to me with a smile. "Every

year, I decorate every corner of my apartment. If there's a surface not covered in twinkling lights or tinsel, then I dropped the ball. When I have my own kids, I'm going to make the biggest fuss over the holidays too. Give them everything I didn't have growing up."

I smile at her, watching her eyes as she talks about something that makes her happy. The glint in her eyes fills my heart with warmth, and all I want to do is reach over and kiss her.

"What's this?" she says, reaching into a box and pulling out an old plastic bundle of mistletoe tied together with a red bow.

I laugh and gently take it from her. She stares at me with a blank face for a moment. Without saying what it is, I hang it over our heads and she finally gets it. She nervously laughs, her skin flushing all the way to the tips of her ears. She bites her lower lip as if she's anticipating me to make a move.

I lean forward, grabbing her chin with my fingers and turning her face toward me. She smiles as I press my lips against hers.

DANIELLA

I know what a mistletoe looks like. I've seen all the Hallmark movies where there's the compulsory mistletoe kiss.

I only showed it to him because I wanted this. Getting close to Dominic is my job. It's what I'm there to do. Even though that's the case, I want to kiss him. I've never wanted to kiss anybody the way I want him.

At first, I think it's just going to be a peck. A quick kiss under the mistletoe, just because it's there and obligatory that we do it. But as soon as our lips touch, it's as if two magnets have connected.

The longing he's felt for me is apparent in the way he holds my face. He pulls it toward him, gripping me tightly as if he's afraid I'll float away from him. I part my mouth to let his tongue in, and the taste of him makes me tingle. Something wet and warm rushes from between my legs.

Dominic pulls away from me, pressing his forehead against mine while he looks down at my chest. I moan as we part, wishing his lips were on mine again. I'm breathing heavily. My chest is rising and falling rapidly, and he's transfixed on it.

"Touch me," I whisper to him, thinking back to how badly I wanted to feel his hands on me in my dream, not certain this isn't one either.

He quickly kisses me again, bringing a hand to the back of my head and running his fingers through my hair, pushing my face

against his. I moan uncontrollably from the heat swelling between my legs.

Dominic unbuttons my blouse and pulls it off me, tossing it aside. We're surrounded by cardboard boxes filled with antiques, so he pushes a few aside before laying me down. His hands fall to my waist, and they slowly make their way up to my breasts. I squeeze my legs together, begging for friction to release the growing desire.

Dominic climbs on top of me, cupping my breasts in his hands, and slowly licks the near-see-through fabric of my bralette. I whimper while his tongue teases my nipples. Small jolts of electricity surge through my body while he pleasures me. My skirt is loose enough that I can spread my legs, so I do.

He takes that as an invitation to press his groin against me. I feel how hard he is, and it turns me on even more. I run my fingers through his hair while he pulls the fabric of my bra down and takes my nipple in his mouth, sucking on it, gently nibbling the pink flesh.

I shouldn't be enjoying this. I should be focused on my work, finding evidence against him, proving he's guilty. But I can't stop myself. I can't pull myself away from him like I know I should. I no longer want Dominic, I *need* him.

He pulls his mouth from my breasts and kisses me again, wrapping my legs around his waist while he slowly grinds against me, teasing himself. His cock feels amazing, and it isn't even out of his pants.

Dominic sits up after a moment and starts unbuckling his pants. The anticipation and excitement I felt quickly turn into anxiety. I've never been with a man before. What if I'm bad at it? What if I can't satisfy him? I don't even really know what to do.

"Dom," I say quickly before he finishes unbuckling. He looks me in the eye with a hunger in them unlike any I'd ever seen in a man before. "I'm... I've never done anything...like this."

He stops fumbling with his belt and moves closer to me, grabbing my face with his hands again.

“You’re a virgin?”

I nod my head, and he smiles at me.

“Is that okay?” I ask him, nervous and kind of embarrassed.

“It’s perfect, little girl,” he whispers before kissing me again.

Little girl. My body reacts to those two words as if they were some kind of code word in hypnosis. I’m pinching my thighs together again, trying to tease myself because of it. I don’t know what it means, but I want him to say it again.

His gentle kisses pepper me. I was nervous before, but now I feel safe. Dominic makes me feel protected and sheltered, like I can share things with him.

His hands still explore my body, though he’s no longer taking his pants off. His underwear is exposed, and I spot his massive bulge. For some reason, it makes me proud I did that to him. I affect him in that way.

Dominic reaches his hands between my legs and my body shivers. The slightest sensation has me moaning for more. He grabs the top of my skirt, pulls it down my legs, and tosses it aside. I’m lying on the ground in just my bra and panties in front of him. This is the most exposed I’ve ever been for a man, and instead of feeling worried about how I look, I’m comforted.

“Look how wet you are,” Dominic growls, mostly to himself as he stares between my legs. He rubs the outside of my panties and stares at me while I bite into my lower lip. “Does that feel good?”

“Yes,” I breathlessly say.

“From now on, you will call me Daddy,” he says, staring me in the eye with a serious face. I nod my head at him to tell him I understand. Then, he stops moving his hand. “I’ll ask again. Does that feel good?”

“Yes, Daddy,” I whisper, staring into his eyes. Those words ignite a fire inside both of us that I don’t think either of us

expected.

Instead of rubbing my panties more, Dominic pulls them down and kneels on the ground in front of me.

“Daddy’s gonna show you how good he can make you feel,” he says seconds before bringing his mouth to my clit.

My eyes shut involuntarily, and my legs spread even wider in front of him as his tongue swirls around my clit. With the gentlest suction from his lips, he teases me while bringing me continuous pleasure with his tongue. I never knew I could feel this good.

I reach down and run my fingers through his hair again, holding him closer to me while his tongue flicks back and forth until I’m arching my back on the carpet and crying out from the overwhelming pleasure filling my body.

When I finish, he sits up. He’s practically bursting through his underwear, and all I want is to feel him. If he made me feel that good with just his tongue, I need to feel *all* of him.

I kiss him again, reach down to touch his thick girth, release it from the fabric confining it, and return the favor. I rub the bulge outside of his pants, and he grunts before pulling my hand away.

“Not right now,” he whispers to me huskily. I stare at him with confusion for a second. “Your first time should be special. Not right now.”

I nod my head at him and smile. “Okay, Daddy,” I whisper and watch his eyes light up at the words.

DOM

Hearing Daniella call me Daddy sends waves of pleasure through my body.

As much as I want to rip her panties off and fuck her right there, I have to hold myself back. She's a virgin. Untouched by any other man and soon enough, she'll be all mine. I will be her first and last. The only one. It excites me more than I ever thought it would.

But that has to wait. On the floor, surrounded by dusty old boxes isn't how any girl dreams of losing their virginity. For Daniella, I'm going to do something special for her, something she'll never forget.

"I want you to sleep here tonight," I say to her after I pull my pants all the way up and button them. I'm still throbbing as I watch her sprawled out on the floor in front of me.

"With you?" Her mouth is pulled into an eager smile as she sits up. I'm almost too distracted by how close her mouth is to my cock to answer.

"Yes, baby." I think of all the things I can do with her and to her. Make her mad with pleasure.

I can't tell her the real reason I want her to sleep here, at least not yet. She probably thinks I'll be sleeping with her tonight, giving her more pleasure and worshiping her body like I want to. But for now, I need to keep an eye on her. Dangerous people know who she really is and I can't risk letting her out of my sight.

“I want you to stay here and finish going through the decorations. I have a few things I need to take care of then I’ll come help you,” I tell her. Her smile falls and she nods her head and grabs her blouse to put it back on. “No. Leave it off,” I demand, and she sets it back down.

I climb the stairs to my home office and shut the door behind me. The first thing I do is log in to the software for my security cameras and replay the last ten minutes of what happened in the living room. I rub myself as I watch Daniella’s body tremble from her orgasm again. I can’t wait to feel her around me. I need it as soon as possible. I finish while thinking about how good my member will feel in her throat, enveloping the girth of it.

When my mind is clear, I focus on my work. There are only a few things I need to do—the most important is figuring out what I plan on doing for Daniella. While I’m working, Paulie calls me. I’ve been putting him off for too long, and I know I need to answer.

“What?” I ask, not offering any more pleasantries.

“We need to talk, ASAP,” he says. I hear him shuffling around his office while we speak. “Gio told me about the secretary—”

“Daniella,” I correct him, demanding he show her some respect.

“She’s a cop, Dominic.” There’s panic in his voice. “We need to do something. We don’t know what she knows about us now. Gio said you want to help her?”

I sigh and roll my eyes. Of course, Gio would run to Paulie and tell him about Daniella. He didn’t even tell him the right information. “I told Gio she could help us. I’m being framed and her job is to find who’s framing me. I’m going to get her to help me find out who it is.”

“What about everything else she’ll find out along the way?” Paulie asks. I can picture him waving his hands around while he argues. “How does this risk outweigh any benefit of her being here? Besides, everyone knows she’s a cop now. No one here is going to talk to her about anything.”

“Look, I already told Gio and I’ll tell you too,” I begin, my tone low and serious. “I’m not going to say it again, but I am taking care of it. End of discussion.”

Paulie doesn’t say anything right away. “Fine,” he eventually says and I hang up the phone before he says anything else.

I know more than anyone that having a cop around is dangerous, but I can’t help it. If it were anyone other than Danielle, they’d be gone by now. But I won’t let anything happen to her. I’d burn the entire casino to the ground and destroy my entire legacy before I let something happen to her.

I KNEW SLEEPING next to Daniella was going to be hard, but I didn’t know half of it before climbing into bed with her. Every time she moves, I have to control myself. Daniella wants me—badly—and I can’t wait to give it to her.

She kisses me softly, wrapping her arms around my neck while we lie there together. She’s in my T-shirt that’s roughly three sizes too big for her and her panties. I can’t stop touching her, feeling her soft skin close to mine. While we kiss, I roll her onto her back and climb on top of her, wrapping her legs around me.

“Daddy, I need you,” she moans into my ear while I kiss her neck, gently grinding against her. I’m wearing briefs and sweatpants, but she can feel how hard I am through everything.

I need her too. My manhood is throbbing and practically begging to be released, to be touched by her.

“Soon, baby,” I whisper in her ear, savoring the taste of her skin and the sweet scent of her for a short while longer.

After a few hours of kissing and teasing each other, Daniella eventually falls asleep. I watch her for a while, thinking about how excited she’ll be when I take her out tomorrow night. I don’t remember trying to fall asleep, but after a while, I close my eyes and drift away.

A SOFT CREAK on the floorboards wakes me up. I look at the clock beside my bed and see that it's only four in the morning. For a moment, the memory of Daniella sleeping beside me feels more like a dream, but the warmth lingering in the sheets beside me proves it to be true.

I figure she must be going to the bathroom or getting a drink of water. I don't know her nighttime routines yet and that seems normal. After a few moments when she doesn't return, I start to worry. After all, several people know the truth about her and want her to be taken care of. Could Gio or Paulie be here trying to take care of that themselves?

At the thought, I jump out of bed and walk down the hall looking for her. I don't see any sign of anyone or hear anything. I don't even see Daniella. I walk back to the bedroom, and she still isn't there.

Then it hits me. I exhale a long, slow breath and make my way to my office. Of course, she's there. Sitting in front of my computer and trying to get into it.

When she sees me, she jumps from the seat and stares at me like a deer caught in headlights. To say seeing her there is unexpected would be a lie. I know she's on a mission. She has to find who killed Officer Daniels, and as far as she knows, I did. She's just doing her job. But that doesn't make me any less angry.

"I was just—" she begins, trying to find an excuse.

"I know what you were doing, Officer Peebles," I say, closing the door behind me and walking over to her.

Her mouth opens and closes for a moment, like a fish out of water. She's nervous, and she probably should be. "You know?"

"Since yesterday," I say, grabbing her arm and pulling her lightly from the desk chair. I hold her in my arms and stare into her eyes for a moment. I expect to see fear in them,

especially considering she's there to investigate me for murder. But I don't. "Your department isn't as tight as you might think."

Daniella tries to pull away from me, but I hold her arm tight enough that she can't. I'm still being gentle because the last thing I want is to hurt her. But she needs to know that lying to me and trying to deceive me is wrong. She needs to be punished.

DANIELLA

“If you let me go, I’ll drop it all,” I whisper, hoping it’ll get him to drop his hands.

I knew I shouldn’t have risked looking at his computer. I don’t even know the password. This was a rookie mistake, and I’ll never hear the end of it at the station. If I ever make it back, that is. Dominic is staring down at me with his eyes narrowed like he’s trying to read me. I should be afraid, but I’m not. I’m anxious and a little apprehensive about what to do now, but I don’t think he’ll hurt me. I know he won’t.

“What did you think you’d find? Proof that I killed that cop?” he asks me. I nod my head and prepare to explain, but he puts a finger to my mouth and stops me.

Before he says anything else, he takes a seat on his chair and pulls me down with him, laying me across his lap. I wiggle to try and free myself, but he’s strong enough to hold me in place with one hand.

“What are you doing?” I ask him, my heart pounding in my chest.

“Teaching you a lesson, little girl,” he says before pulling the oversized t-shirt I’m wearing up and exposing my rear. “You went snooping around in my office. Now, I have to punish you.”

“Wha—” I start to ask before his hand smacks down against my rear. I yelp mostly from the shock, and my breath quickens. I turn to look at him and see a pleased smile on his face.

Dominic's hand touches the skin on my ass, still raw from his slap, and gently rubs it. In the blink of an eye, he lifts it and smacks the other cheek. This time, I gasp and let out a quiet moan against him. I can feel him hardening underneath me. He likes this. I do too.

I arch my back slightly, urging him to touch me again. His hand massages my skin, climbing underneath the panties I'm wearing. I'm growing more aroused with every passing second. Since the day before, when his tongue was between my legs, taking me to places I never thought I'd be, I've been craving him.

We spent hours in bed, and I was ready for him then. I'm ready for him now. I don't know what he's waiting for. I've never been so certain about anything before in my life.

"Stand up," he commands me, and I obey.

I look down at his pants and see how hard he is as clear as day. I lick my lips thinking about how I did that to him.

"Lift your shirt," he continues, leaning back on the chair while he watches me. I do as he says and take my shirt off, exposing my bare breasts to him. He leans forward and slides my panties off me. He pats his lap and my heart races. This is finally it. He's going to give me exactly what I want.

I climb onto his lap, straddling him, and his hands run up my body. He grabs my breasts and quickly takes one in his mouth. He leans my head back and moans, wrapping my arms around his neck to hold onto. When he finally pulls away, he looks up at me and lowers his hands between my legs.

I gasp when I feel the warmth of them as he rubs my clit gently before slipping his fingers between my lips and hovering them just outside of my hole. I brace myself against him. I've never explored myself so I don't know what to expect. Gently, he slips a finger inside of me, and my hips buck. It feels better than I thought it would, and I savor the sensations as he moves his finger in and out of me.

Dominic's tongue grazes my skin while I gently rock my hips back and forth on his hand. All I can think about is how good

just his finger feels and how much better it will feel to finally have all of him inside of me.

My fingers fall to his groin, and I trace his shaft through his pants, which makes him moan while my breast is in his mouth. I press my hands harder against it and feel it twitching in his pants. My body rocks against his, and I lean back while holding onto his neck. He pulls his mouth away from me and watches me with a smile while I finish.

He brings his finger to his mouth and tastes my juices, savoring every drop. I hungrily stare at him, teasing him with my hand, desperately hoping it's time for him to give it to me. He pulls my hand away and orders me to stand up.

“Go to bed,” he says, handing me the t-shirt. “We’ll talk about this more in the morning.”

I nod my head and slip the T-shirt over my head before leaving. My mind is reeling, thinking over what just happened. Dominic knows I’m a cop. Someone from the force tipped him off, and he just let me walk away. To say I’m confused has got to be the understatement of the millennium. Still, I’m tired. Eventually, I fall asleep.



WHEN I WAKE up in the morning, Dominic isn’t beside me. Come to think of it, I don’t remember him ever rejoining me in bed. I sit up, rub the sleep from my eyes, and look around the room. Everything from the night before comes into focus, and I’m filled with disbelief. I knew I had feelings for Dominic, but I never imagined it would go as far as it did. What surprises me the most is how much farther I want it to go still—even after he spanked me.

I reach for my phone on the nightstand, where I’m positive I left it the night before, and it’s gone. I jump out of the bed and search through the covers, under the bed, in the nightstand drawer—every spot I can think of. It isn’t anywhere to be found.

“Looking for this?” Dominic says behind me. I jump a little from the unexpected comment.

I turn around to see him leaning in the doorway with my phone in his hand. I don’t know what he did with it, but I can only assume he looked through it. As far as I’m aware, there isn’t any information about the case in it. But there are plenty of messages between me and Sergeant Tully that Dominic could have seen.

Sergeant Tully. I was supposed to meet him last night after my shift at the casino, and I completely forgot. Dominic distracted me, and it slipped my mind. He’s probably worried sick about me.

“I need to check in,” I say to him, running my fingers through my hair. “If I don’t, they’ll think I’m dead and they’ll send officers to the casino to check on me.”

“Tully sent you several messages checking in,” Dominic says as he approaches me and holds the phone out for me. “I took the liberty of telling him you’re alright. You need to meet with him in person today. But before you do that, we have an awful lot to talk about.”

He holds a hand out for me, and I take it. I follow him through the halls into the kitchen. Along the way, I’m met with the warm smell of buttery pancakes and syrup mingling with savory bacon in the air. The table is full of steaming hot breakfast food. Dominic pulls a chair out for me and I take a seat, smiling up at him.

Our situation is bizarre, to say the least. He knows I’m an officer, so he knows that I’m here investigating him. And yet, we had an incredible time together last night. Now he’s made me a delicious breakfast. Dominic is nothing like I thought he would be before I started working on this case. I’m pleasantly surprised by him, yet I can’t help but think he has ulterior motives.

“I’m sure you have a lot of questions,” I say after a minute. “You must be angry with me.”

“Actually, I’m not,” he admits before shoveling some scrambled eggs onto both of our plates. “Even when I found out initially, I wasn’t mad. I was more worried than anything. You’re around a lot of dangerous people, and I was worried about what they’d do if they found out the truth. Honestly, I thought I could take advantage of what you’re there for.”

I furrow my brows and look at him. “What do you mean?”

“You’re investigating me. I’ve known that I’m the main suspect in Officer Daniels’ murder for a while,” he continues, pausing while taking a sip of his coffee. “But I didn’t do it. I think you know that too.”

I nod my head and wrap my hands around my steaming cup of coffee. Before I went to the casino, I was positive Dominic was our guy. The more I’ve gotten to know him, the more I’ve been questioning that. Yes, he is the leader of the DeLuca family, but I can’t picture him killing someone. Call it intuition, but I know that despite what he does, he’s a good guy.

“I figured if I kept you close to me, then you could find out who’s really behind the murder and help me clear my name,” he says with a sigh. “Unfortunately, that’s not going to work now.”

“What do you mean?” I ask him, resting my hands in my lap. “I’m still on the case. Tully doesn’t know anything about us. He has no reason to pull me. If you’re innocent, let me help you find who did this. They’re obviously framing you.”

I reach my hand across the table to grab his. I want to help him. He pats my hand and smiles at me. “Too many people at the casino know you’re a cop,” he informs me.

I think back to how Gio reacted the last time I saw him and realize that I was right. As much as I want to help prove Dominic is innocent, staying at the casino could be dangerous for me.

“What can I do to help you?” I ask him, hoping there’s something he’ll let me do.

He looks over at me with a serious expression and takes a deep breath. “I know this could get you in a lot of trouble, but I need you to get me the case file.”

“O kay,” Daniella says as if I didn’t just ask her to risk throwing away her career for me. She never hesitated and never even thought about what I was asking her to do. She just agreed to do it.

I stand up and lean over the table, grabbing her chin and tilting it up to my face before kissing her. If I didn’t know that I loved Daniella before this, I sure as hell know now. For her to risk throwing away her career for me, I know she must feel the same way. When I think about how it’s only been a few days since I first met her, it almost makes me laugh. In such a short time, I feel like I’ve gotten to know everything there is about her.

She and I finish breakfast and get ready to take care of everything we need to. Sergeant Tully had been worried about Daniella the day before, but I hope my message to him this morning eased his mind. I’m hoping that when she goes to the office to check in with him, she can get a copy of my case file and bring it back to me.

The department has been very tight-lipped about the investigation since it started. Mike was able to get me some information, but most of what he gave me was word of mouth. I know there has to be more in the case file, so I need to see it. The DeLuca family is difficult to penetrate, so I know there are things the cops won’t have access to that I will. If I can just see the evidence they have, I might be able to figure out what’s really going on.

I drive Daniella back to her apartment and wait for her to get a change of clothes before I drive her back to the casino. I don't want her going in, but I can't drop her off at the police station without risking someone seeing us. As much as I want to keep an eye on her, I have to let her drive there herself. I watch her get into her car safely and drive off before I go inside the casino.

My mind is preoccupied thinking about everything Daniella is going to say to her sergeant, but I force myself to act as normal as possible. I can't have anybody in the casino thinking that I'm working against them with a cop.

When I get to my office, I find Paulie sitting at the assistant desk in front of my door. He raises an eyebrow at me and stands up.

"Assistant out sick?" he asks, nodding to her empty desk.

"She won't be coming back," I tell him, walking into my office and setting my briefcase down.

"How'd you handle it?" he asks as he follows behind me.

Paulie is my right-hand man and one of my best friends. Normally, I would trust him with just about anything. But because of the conversation we had last night, I'm worried about his motivations. He doesn't want Daniella in the picture at all. With people like him, death is the best way to make sure that happens.

"Paid her off," I say, not offering him any more information.

"Dominic," he says with a sigh. "How do you know she isn't going to take that back to her boss and get you for bribery? Bribing her might as well be an admission of guilt."

"I'm not asking for your opinions, Paulie," I tell him, turning to glare at him. He needs to know this isn't a subject I'll allow him to pry into. "I took care of it. That's all you and Gio and whoever else the two of you told needs to know."

Paulie stares at me for a moment with a stoic expression. Eventually, a smile cracks on his face and he laughs. "Sore subject, huh? I bet you'll miss seeing her across from you."

He slaps me on the shoulder as if I'm going to join in the fun of talking about how good Daniella looks. I ignore him and cross my arms, hoping he'll stop before it really pisses me off.

"Don't be so sensitive, Dom," he says, taking a seat across from me. "That's why you wanted her to work for you anyway. She's gorgeous. It's a shame she had to go. I had a hard time keeping my eyes off her. The things I would do to her—"

I'm a patient man, but when it comes to someone talking about my woman that way, I lose it. I storm around the desk and pick Paulie up by the collar of his shirt before pushing him down on the ground. He stares up at me, face turning ashen, while I grit my teeth at him.

"Shut your mouth!" I seethe, pointing down at him.

Paulie scrambles to his feet and straightens out his clothes before turning to face me. "I see I struck a nerve," he mumbles, giving me a knowing glance.

He clearly has his own suspicions, and my actions confirm them. Paulie knows that the feelings I have for Daniella are real. He pushed my buttons to pry for information, and I gave it all to him. Despite that, I don't care. I know he won't do anything to harm Daniella personally, especially not if he knows I care about her. Paulie isn't the type to get his hands dirty.

"I don't want to hear you speak about her anymore," I demand, lowering my eyes to him and not removing them. "Do you understand?"

"Yes," he says with a grimace before leaving my office.

I sit down at my desk when he leaves and wait by the phone for Daniella to contact me. The biggest risk for us right now is her getting caught while she steals a copy of the case file. She told me they're not supposed to leave the office with them usually, and that is being heavily enforced in my case. Luckily, she's friendly and charming, and I doubt anyone will suspect her of doing anything wrong.

After an hour, she texts me and tells me she's driving back to her apartment and doesn't say anything else. I immediately grab my things and head to her.

It's almost dark by the time I arrive thanks to the winter sun, but I can see the lights she mentioned twinkling in her window. When I see that, I get excited about the surprise I have planned for her later. I send her a message to let her know I'm there, and shortly after, she rushes out of the front door and climbs in my car, nervously ducking down and sliding a pair of oversized sunglasses on to hide her face.

"Discreet." I laugh, looking at how nervous she is.

"You never know who's watching," she whispers while she buckles her seatbelt.

I pull out of her street and drive for a few minutes before we say anything else. When we're far enough away from her apartment, I pull into a crowded parking lot.

"Did you get it?" I ask her, being vague with my words. I trust her, but I still don't know what happened yet. She could have a wire or her phone could be tapped. The other officer might have had ways to coerce her into adding one. I doubt that's the case, but it's better to be careful.

"I got it," she says as she pulls a folder out of her bag. The name on the front isn't mine, but when she hands it to me, I can clearly see that it is. "I made a copy and hid it in a decoy folder. I really thought it would be more difficult."

I laugh with her as I look over the evidence briefly. "Thank you for this," I say, reaching a hand over to the back of her head to pull it toward me. I kiss her and pull away after a few moments.

"I'm sure you can find some way to make it up to me," she says with a soft smile.

"Actually, I think I already have," I tease before I slip the envelope under the seat of my car and put it in drive again. "I've got a little surprise that I think you're gonna love."

Daniella asks a few questions while I'm driving, but I don't answer any of them, only throwing her a smirk or squeezing

her thigh. I want her to be as shocked as possible when she finally sees it.

We pull up to the parking lot of the light show I'm taking her to, and the excitement shines in her eyes.

"I've been wanting to come here for so long!" she yells, jumping up and down in front of me and reaching for my hand.

She doesn't know half of the surprise yet, so I don't say anything. We walk to the ticket booth, and I show my ID to the woman working inside. She waves us through, and I watch Daniella as she takes everything in.

Every year, a park near us transforms into a vibrant light display for the holidays. There are all kinds of holiday-themed sculptures and attractions that make this event a staple for the holiday season. Daniella's eyes twinkle under all of the lights as she looks around in awe.

"Where is everybody?" she asks, not fully believing what she's seeing.

"This is all for us tonight," I tell her, wrapping my arm around her waist and leading her forward.

I called last night and took care of all the necessary arrangements to reserve the entire park for us. Normally, it would be packed with couples on their dates or families wandering through the mazes of lights, but not tonight. All of this is just for Daniella and me.

"This is insane," Daniella whispers as she marvels at all the beauty around us.

"Do you like it?"

She nods her head excitedly, then stands on her tip-toes to kiss me. I hold her tightly against me for a few moments while we embrace, then reluctantly let her go so we can explore together.

The first thing we do is visit the refreshment stand and get something warm to drink during our walkthrough. Daniella is

shivering from the cold and nothing soothes that quite like warm apple cider.

I take her arm and lock it with mine while we walk through a tall archway decorated with warm yellow lights and bright green garland. A mistletoe hangs in the center and both of us laugh, remembering how just the night before we kissed for the first time thanks to one. I lean down and kiss her again before we continue.

At the end of the tour, we sit down on a bench and stare up at the night sky together for a while. Daniella clutches my arm and rests her head on my shoulder while we stargaze. The moon is bright, illuminating the stars nearby just for us to see.

“When I was a kid, I always dreamt of coming to places like this,” she says after a few minutes. “My mom probably would have taken me if I asked her enough, but I never did.”

“Why’s that?” I look down at her. A somber expression falls across her face, and I reach down to brush some of her hair aside.

“I didn’t want to do things like this without my dad,” she admits, taking a deep breath. “I would imagine all the other families walking around happily, together... *alive*. It made me sad to think about it because my dad died, and I never got to know him.”

“So you’d rather not go than subject yourself to that feeling?”

“I guess so,” she admits, sitting up and looking at me with a half smile. “But I’m glad I’m here with you. This is lovelier than I could have ever dreamt of. Thank you.”

I lean forward and kiss her forehead before standing up and extending my hand for hers. We start making our way back to the entrance after walking around for over an hour. Before we can make it there, Daniella stops us in the middle of a walkway and points at something in the distance.

“Is that a photo booth?” she asks, laughing softly. I nod my head and follow her as she lets go of my hand and rushes toward it. “Come on,” she beckons to me after opening the small black curtain.

I chuckle and follow her in. It's dimly lit and somewhat cramped inside. Daniella fumbles around with something and pulls a small box of things out from under the bench. We both laugh as we look through the different hats and props inside of it. She finds a red velvet Santa Claus hat and slips it on my head with a smile. She climbs onto my lap and wraps an arm around my neck.

My hands land on her thighs, and she giggles when I touch her. "Now, little girl, have you been naughty or nice?" I ask, teasing her before kissing her.

"Lately, I've been very naughty," she whispers, kissing my ear and running her hands along my chest. "Daddy even had to punish me for it."

I lower my mouth to her neck and gently bite her before unbuttoning her jacket so I can feel her body. When it's undone, I lift her shirt enough to see her beautiful, perky tits and lower the cup of her bra to take her nipple in my mouth.

"See what I mean?" she moans, holding the back of my head while I lose myself tasting her perfect body.

I unbutton her jeans and slide a hand inside of them while I flick her nipple in my mouth. She moans as I rub her clit through her panties. Fuck, she's soaked.

Daniella's surprises for the night aren't over. I'm going to give her exactly what she wants soon enough. Tonight, she will be mine completely.

DANIELLA

Something about being in public with Dominic touching me makes it all the more exciting. I was already desperate for him before we got to the park, but now it's uncontrollable. If he wants to lie down on the ground in the middle of the attraction, I'll do it for him. I'll do anything for him.

When he calls me "little girl," something shifts in me. It's unexplainable, but it feels like every nerve ending in my body is alert. Like my world has rearranged itself.

I reach down and feel the front of his pants and see that he's clearly very aroused. His hands are inside my pants, and I'm close to screaming his name for all of the employees in the vicinity to hear. If that's what Dominic wants, I'll do it.

Before I can get there, he pulls his hands away from me and lowers my shirt. "Please don't," I whisper, staring down at him with glazed-over eyes. "You make me feel so good."

"We need to leave," he says, collecting himself and quickly guiding me out of the park.

I just barely grab the small photo card that drops from the booth before he leads me away. He thanks the woman in the ticketing booth and rushes me back to his car.

"What's wrong?" I ask him, not sure why he wants to leave so suddenly.

"Absolutely nothing." He flashes me a smile.

My heart pounds in my chest. Could tonight be the night for us? He wanted me to wait for a more special moment, and what could be better than this?

Along the drive back, Dominic rests his hand on my lap, occasionally sliding them further inside and rubbing my pussy through the outside of my jeans. I don't know how I managed not to go crazy during the ride.

When we arrive, both of us hurry inside. He helps me take my coat off, and as soon as I'm free of it, he picks me up and pins me against the front door. My legs wrap around him while his mouth warms the skin of my neck.

Dominic pulls away from me and the look in his eyes is familiar. I've seen it before when we've kissed, but there's something more to it this time. There's almost a feral look in his eyes like he can't control himself much longer. I love it.

He carries me up the stairs and into his bedroom where he tosses me down on the bed. He wastes no time tearing my blouse off or pulling my jeans down and tossing them aside. Dominic spreads my legs and drops to the ground in front of me. Before I know it, his mouth is pressed firmly against my pussy, over my panties. It's just enough to tease me, to build the anticipation even more before he finally pulls them down and lets me feel his tongue again.

Dominic lifts his shirt over his head and unbuttons his pants, pulling them down so he's just in his briefs. I want to see all of him. I've been dying to since our first kiss. But before I can ask him to lower his briefs, he tears my panties and his tongue explores me. I fall back on the bed and writhe against it while he tastes me.

After a few extraordinary minutes, he pulls himself away and stares up at me with the same expression I saw by the door. He isn't done, and he won't be for a while. I know now that it's finally the night.

He stands, and I sit up to touch his hard-rock erection. I look up at him, biting my lower lip to see him smiling down at me while he runs his fingers through my hair.

“Do you want it?” he asks me and I nod my head. My mind is racing. I can’t find the words to tell him exactly how badly I want him. “What do you want?”

“I want you, Daddy,” I whisper, stroking him through his briefs.

“You want to be all mine, little girl?” he asks, hooking a finger under my chin. I nod my head and swallow nervously while I continue stroking. “Then do exactly what I tell you now. Understand?”

He brushes his thumb over my lower lip and slowly sticks it inside, moving it deeper into my mouth. My tongue brushes against his skin and he groans.

“Open your mouth,” he demands when he pulls his thumb out. I do as he says and open my mouth wide for him. “I’m just gonna give you a taste,” he whispers before he lowers his briefs and finally releases his cock for me.

I gasp at the size of it and close my mouth for a moment before Dominic grabs my face again and looks down at me with a stern look. I open my mouth for him again.

“Now, get on your knees,” he says and I obey. I’m inches away from his massive size and just waiting for his next command.

Before I know it, he’s pressing the tip against my lips for entrance. He’s so big that I have to open my mouth even wider to fit it inside. I moan as the tip of his cock fills my mouth. He’s dripping on my tongue, and I savor the taste of his arousal. He doesn’t move once the tip is inside. He looks down at me with a smile and bunches some of my hair behind my head.

I grab his shaft with both of my hands and slowly stroke it while I look up at him, seeing the look in his eyes only get stronger as I tease him. I let my tongue glide along his tip while it’s in my mouth, which seems to please him.

Before I can really get into what I’m doing, he pulls his cock out of my mouth and motions for me to stand up. I stand and he takes my bra off before tossing it aside.

“Lie back on the bed and spread your legs apart for me,” he says.

My heart pounds in my chest as I crawl to the middle of his bed and do as he says. Soon after, he’s kneeling on the bed in front of me. He’s so hard that I can practically see it throbbing. It’s intimidating to look at, but I need it inside of me.

Dominic inches closer to me and presses his cock against the entrance of my pussy, slowly pushing inside of me. My body tenses at first from the discomfort, but Dominic holds still inside of me so I can adjust to him.

“Daddy’s not going to hurt you,” he whispers in my ear when he leans down.

The weight of him on top of me is comforting, so I nod my head and relax under him. After a few seconds, he starts slowly thrusting his hips against mine. He feels incredible, and soon enough, I get lost in the moment.

“Dominic!” I cry out when warmth starts to fill my body as he brings me closer to orgasm.

He quickens his pace and slams his hips against me. I feel whole like he’s been missing from my life for so long and now I have exactly what I’ve always needed.

Pleasure ripples through my body, and I tremble against the bed while Dominic holds me in his arms, not relenting with his motions. When I’m done, he slows down, but he’s still hard inside of me.

He sits up on his knees and looks down at my breathless body, still shaking from the first orgasm he gave me. He lifts my hips and holds me firmly in place in front of him, thrusting himself deeper and faster. I cry out again as the pleasure returns and I feel myself getting closer to the edge. This time, Dominic is about to explode inside of me, so I try to pace myself for that.

It hits me all of a sudden that this is what he meant by being his. He’s going to come inside of me, claiming me as his own. Surprisingly, the idea of that is almost enough to help me

finish a second time. But when he thickens inside me, it pushes me over the edge.

Both of us moan while he pulls my hips toward him with enough force to shake the bed frame. He finishes with several long, deep pumps inside of me before he pulls out. Dominic drops my hips down on the bed and stares at me.

I smile at him while he watches me catch my breath from the aftershocks of the orgasms he just gave me.

“All mine,” he whispers to himself while his hands caress my body.

Daniella feels better than I ever could have imagined.

Hearing her cry my name doesn't get old either. I could have listened to that all night long. As much as I want to fuck her until the sun comes up, filling her to the brim with my spend and claiming her as mine forever, I know she'll need some time to recuperate. After all, that was her first time.

I fucked her harder than I thought I would, but she responded very well to it. I couldn't control myself when I was inside of her. It felt like something else took over.

Daniella is warm in my arms, breathing softly as she sleeps nestled against my chest. It's extremely difficult not to get aroused looking at her soft, curvy body next to mine. I know that if I wake her up and tell her to bend over, she'll do it, and boy do I love that about her, but she needs rest.

I WAKE up in the morning to Daniella straddling me, kissing my neck, and rubbing my chest with her hands. My body clearly woke up before my mind because I'm as hard as a rock, feeling her ass gently tapping against me.

"Good morning, baby," I growl, running my hands up her thighs. "Couldn't get enough, could you?"

"I dreamt about you last night," she admits, sitting up and sliding back on me so she's hovering right in front of my cock.

“I trust it was a good dream given this reaction.”

“Very good.” She laughs, leaning down and kissing my chest. “I want to make you feel good,” she moans, climbing down my body until her face is inches from my cock.

“Did you like tasting Daddy yesterday?” I ask her, grabbing some of her hair and holding it. She nods her head and smiles up at me before gently kissing my shaft, working her way to the tip. “Use your tongue, baby.”

She opens her mouth, slathering my cock with her spit while she licks it like a lollipop. Daniella spends a couple of minutes swirling her tongue around the tip, watching me while I lean my head back and savor the feeling.

“I want you to take all of it in,” I tell her. She nods her head and wraps her mouth around the tip, gently sucking in while her tongue curls around it. “Fuck.”

Soon enough, she’s taking more and more of my cock in her mouth. Spit drips from her chin and wets me even more as she continues bobbing her head up and down. She backs her head up like she’s going to pull it away for a moment.

“No,” I tell her and she stops backing away. “You can go deeper.”

She keeps moving until she takes all of my cock in her mouth. By the time she’s there, I’m moments away from coming. I hold the back of her head still while I thrust my hips toward her face. She gags while I’m deep in her throat, and it only makes the pleasure more intense. Eventually, I come and Daniella swallows every bit of it. I finally let go of her head and she pulls her mouth away. Spit and come drip on her lips as she hangs her mouth open and catches her breath.

“You’re amazing,” I say before I lean forward and kiss her.

Getting out of bed when Daniella is here with me is hard, but both of us manage to leave. I still have some important business to tend to with the case.

“Why don’t you keep decorating here today?” I suggest after I finish getting dressed. “I’m gonna focus on that case file so we can get this investigation over with.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Daniella says, kissing me one last time before she bounds down the stairs into the living room to finish decorating my tree.

I head to the office and dig through the drawers looking for the case file Daniella stole for me. I almost panic, thinking it was misplaced or stolen. Then, I remember that I left it in the car. I was too distracted with Daniella last night to think about grabbing it.

When I walk through the living room to head outside, Daniella is happily singing along to one of the old Rat Pack Christmas songs. I stop and stare at her for a moment while she’s too busy decorating to notice me. I just want to do what I need to so I can join her and make more memories with her.

I rush out of the house and open my car door to grab the folder and leave. That’s all I went out there to do.

Unfortunately, when I stand up, holding the folder in my hands, I see a shadow approaching from behind me. I turn around to see who it is, but before I can get a good look, a fist is in my face and I fall backward.

DANIELLA

The Christmas tree is my priority with decorating right now.

I figure that once I have the tree decorated, I can decorate the rest of the living room to accommodate it. That way, the tree will be the centerpiece. I'm happier than I've been in a very long time. I can't remember a time when I've been so optimistic about the future.

I'm singing along to some of my favorite Christmas songs and decorating a tree for Dominic, whom I've known for a short time but feel so strongly about. I just can't wait to see what the future holds for us.

When the box I'm working on is empty, I turn around to look for another. The front door catches my eye. It's cracked open just a bit and the daylight shines through. At first, I think Dominic must have stepped out and I don't worry about it. Then I hear movement coming from two different angles.

With my training, I know right away that I'm not alone. I'm trained to be aware of my surroundings and how to escape dangerous situations. Unfortunately for me, I thought I was safe in Dominic's house, so I let my guard down. I should have been more aware, but there's no time to dwell on that now.

I survey the room, looking for something I can grab to defend myself if it comes to it. I grab a fireplace poker and grip it firmly in my hand. If anyone tries to rush me, I might be able to scare them off enough to back away at the very least. Two

people are moving around. I can only hope one of them is Dominic.

Finally, one of them comes into view and my heart sinks. It's Gio. He knows I'm a cop, and he's here in the house with me. Maybe Dominic invited him here, but I don't think it's likely.

When he sees me in the living room with the poker in my hand, he stops and laughs. My stomach twists into a knot, and I know I should be nervous.

"You really think that'll keep me away?" he asks after he stops laughing. "Might buy you a few seconds to run, but you wouldn't get very far."

He reaches around his back and pulls out a pistol then waves it in the air.

"Dominic!" I yell, hoping the other footsteps I heard were his.

"He's a little tied up right now," Paulie's voice says from the hall. It takes a moment, but he comes into view with a twisted smile on his face. "All you had to do was follow the evidence you were given and arrest him. It was all there, you know. You had enough to book him. Any sane jury would have found him guilty."

"W-what?" I ask, slowly walking backward to get away from them.

"The evidence you needed to arrest Dominic was all there," Paulie repeats, walking toward me. "I made sure of it."

"You planted the evidence?" I clarify. Paulie nods his head and spreads his arms apart with a smile as if he's inviting me to praise him. "You killed Daniels."

"He wasn't a good cop," Paulie says, shrugging his shoulders. "Honestly, you guys should be thanking me for that one. He fed us a lot of information. Why do you think he spent his entire career investigating the family but never got anything on us? Money can buy you just about anything."

"So why'd you kill him?" I ask, shocked by everything I'm hearing. "Why would you kill someone working for you?"

“He knew too much.” Paulie reaches for his belt to grab a burlap sack hanging from it. “I had another little plan up my sleeve too, so I figured killing him would be the best way to get the ball rolling with that. Two birds, one bullet.”

I stumble on an old box as I back away from them. Given the sack in Paulie’s hand, I have a hunch that he doesn’t plan on keeping me in the house for long. I need to escape, but I don’t know how with Gio waving a gun at me. I’m unarmed and no one else on the force knows I’m here. I’ve really gotten myself into a tough situation.

I kick the box I stumbled on toward Paulie, but it doesn’t go very far. He just walks around it to get to me.

“This will be a hell of a lot easier for you if you just cooperate,” Paulie warns me, approaching me slowly as if I were a scared cat in the bushes.

“You want me to just go with you after you tell me you killed Daniels?” I ask with an incredulous laugh.

“It’s either that or Gio shoots you right here,” he says. I look at Gio who smiles while waving the gun at me again. “My old buddy Dominic is knocked out in the driveway. I could set the scene well enough for him to go down for your murder and make it look like you’re working for us. What do you think, Daniella? Should we bring shame to your father’s legacy? Or do you want to come with us and die a hero?”

I take a deep breath and think about what I want to do. There’s no way I can go with Paulie. I can’t trust him, and who knows what he has planned for me wherever we end up? My only chance is to try and take Gio down.

“If death is the only option,” I say, preparing to lunge out of the way, “then I’ll take my chances fighting.”

I jump behind the couch just in time to dodge a bullet Gio aimed at me. It hits the Christmas tree and shatters some shiny red bulbs. I crawl around the couch to try and avoid being in the crosshairs of his next shot. Another bullet shoots through the back of the couch, inches away from my face.

To my right, there's a wall leading into the dining room. I quickly run for it, jumping the last few feet to quicken my pace. A bullet trails behind me, but Gio is thankfully too slow for me. Unfortunately, there are two entrances into the dining room and no other exit. Gio stands in one doorway, pointing his gun at me and ordering me to put my hands up while Paulie stands in the other.

I have nowhere to run.

"Put the gun down, Gio," Paulie says as he grabs my arms and holds them behind my back. "We've got her now."

I watch as Gio slides the gun into the holster before the burlap sack is brought down over my eyes and I can't see anything.

I come to on the pavement in my driveway, with my head throbbing from the blow I took. I don't stay down long enough to try and recover. Instead, I rush right into the house.

“Daniella!” My voice is hoarse and broken. It was definitely more than just the blow to the head that I took. Whoever attacked me took the liberty of beating me while I was unconscious like the coward they are. They couldn't face me in a fair fight, so they had to play dirty.

She isn't in the living room where I last saw her. She's not in the kitchen, the dining room, or the bedroom. She's missing. I scream her name over again, hoping she might appear out of thin air and prove me wrong, but she doesn't.

I sprint to my office and log in to my computer. The surveillance cameras I have are hidden, so I don't think whoever attacked me would have had the foresight to tamper with them.

First, I check the living room footage. Figuring out what happened to Daniella is my priority. I scrub through the footage, searching for the most recent timestamps when she was decorating. I find the footage and watch it for a minute before I see what happened. The worry I felt before watching the footage turns into a white-hot rage. I slam my fists down onto my desk and knock over some of the items on top of it.

Those fuckers.

I'm shaking from the fury I feel. Paulie did this to me. Of all the people in the world, Paulie betrayed me. I don't take a second to even think about what I'm going to do before I grab my keys and run out of the house. I'm going to kill him.

I slam my car door shut behind me and put the key in the ignition, halting when I realize I don't know where Paulie had taken her. I run through all the options of places I think he would take her to. His house in the city doesn't seem like a safe place to hide from me, so I write that off. But as I think about that, I remember him telling me about a lake house he bought a few months ago about an hour away. I don't know how long I've been out, but I know he's got a decent headstart against me. Driving an hour away right now is a gamble, but it's a risk I have to take.

I don't know the address, so the first thing I do is drive to Paulie's house and hope I can find it there. There's no car in the driveway when I arrive, so I assume his wife is out. That's best for me. I walk around the back of the house and break the glass on the back door to get in.

I've been at Paulie's house enough times to know his security code, so I type it in and the alarm stops before it alerts anyone. I run up to his office and dig through his drawers for any paperwork involving the closing of his lake house. Thankfully, I find a contract for it with the address listed on the top.

I sneak back out of the house before I get caught by Paulie's wife whenever she returns home. The last thing I need is for her to call him and tell him that I was at the house. I type the location of the lake house into my GPS and make my way there hastily.

It takes me a little under an hour to drive to the lake where his house is, which I'm very thankful for because of the lack of traffic. If Paulie had waited one day and decided to do this on Christmas Eve, I might not have made it to Daniella in time.

I don't park in front of his house because I don't want him to hear me and be aware that I found him. Instead, I park on the street a few houses down and run over. His car is in the driveway, so I know I was right to assume she's here. I let out

a relieved breath knowing that, unfortunately, I don't know what state she's in right now.

Movement in one of the windows catches my eye, and I watch for a moment. Gio stands there with his hand on the hilt of a gun, looking down at something. I don't hesitate rushing inside. If Gio's pointing a gun at her again, there isn't time to waste trying to sneak.

The front door is locked, but that doesn't stop me from kicking it in. The loud bang obviously catches Gio and Paulie's attention, and they both rush downstairs. Paulie stares at me as if he's in shock by my presence. Gio points his gun at me and looks to Paulie for an answer.

"Not yet," Paulie calmly says, resting a hand on Gio's to push the gun down. "What brings you here, Dom?"

"Where is she?" I snarl, demanding an answer from them both. Before they can say anything, I hear stomping on the floor above me alongside some muffled screaming.

"Is that a good enough answer for you?" Paulie asks with a sick smile on his face. "I'm not gonna lie, I didn't expect to see you yet. But now that you're here, I might have use for you." He holds his finger to his chin and paces the floor in front of me.

"Just let her go. This doesn't have to end in violence," I warn him. He looks at Gio, and they both laugh. They think they have the upper hand on me because of one gun. In any other circumstance, I would play along with them to protect myself, but that isn't an option here. Not when Daniella is in danger.

If I have to throw myself in front of a bullet for her, so be it.

"I would have left her out of this if I hadn't known she was your little girlfriend," Paulie continues, gesturing to the stairwell and shrugging. "Now I get to have the death of two cops on my resume."

I can't listen to him anymore. I don't want an explanation. I don't want to hear his voice or how amused he is with himself. I want him on the ground, in a pool of his own blood.

Before I can hurt Paulie, I need to take care of the gun.

Daniella bangs on the floor while we talk. Every time she does, Gio turns his head to the stairs nervously, clearly worried she's going to free herself from her restraints and run. I wait a moment for him to look in her direction again, and then I lunge at him.

Taking him down is easy. The gun slides from his hand and crashes into the wall next to us. He and I both reach for it at the same time, but I elbow him in the face hard enough for him to grasp at his now-broken nose. With the gun in my hand, I jump to my feet and point it at Gio on the ground.

"Now, Dom. Think about what you're doing," Paulie says, slowly approaching me with his hands up to plead with me to stop. "Gio's your family. Your blood. Hurting him is just gonna turn everyone else against you."

I scoff at him and aim the gun at Gio's leg before shooting him. The gunshot echoes through the room, making my ears ring so much that I can barely hear Gio screaming profanities below me. I step over him and walk toward Paulie, pointing the gun right at him. He backs away until he's pinned against the wall.

"Come on now," he says.

I lower the gun and stare at him, making him think for a moment that what he said worked. Truthfully, shooting him isn't enough. It's too quick, too easy. I want to make him hurt.

He lets out a relieved sigh, and in an instant, I grab his head and slam it into the wall behind him. He howls from the sudden pain, blinking his eyes quickly while he tries to regain some sense. Before he can do anything to fight back, I grab his shirt and pick him up, tossing him into the glass coffee table in the center of the room.

"You want to try and hurt *my* girl." I climb on top of him, disregarding the shards of glass penetrating my skin.

Paulie shakes his head and tries to push me away. I clock him in the face several times, watching more blood pour from his skin with each blow. He's begging me to stop, but it's too late for that. Any control I had before I started hitting him is gone

now. I'm seeing red. All I can think about is how scared Daniella must have been. He and Gio shot at her. They tried to kill her.

Paulie's body stills below me, and I finally manage to pull myself out of the frenzy I was in. He's still breathing, but I stop hitting him. Quiet groans escape his throat as he moves his head back and forth slowly.

I stand up, walk past Gio who's still howling on the ground, trying to stop the bleeding from his gunshot wound, and climb the stairs. Daniella is sitting on the floor of a bedroom with her hands and feet bound by rope and duct tape over her mouth. She screams through the tape when she sees me, hopping on the floor to try and get closer.

At first glance, she doesn't seem hurt. But I need to get a better look at her to know for sure. I pull the tape off her face as gently as I can and see that it left behind a bright red mark on her pale flesh.

"They attacked me at the house!" she cries out, trying to explain what happened. I listen to her tell me everything in one long, breathless sentence while I untie the ropes around her wrists. "Thank you," she whispers while tears fall from her eyes.

I grab her face and make her look at me, bringing mine up close to her. "I will *never* let anything bad happen to you ever again," I tell her before kissing her.

DANIELLA

After Paulie confessed everything to me, we can finally close the case on who killed Daniels.

It feels good knowing that the work I did somehow helped solve his murder. The only bad part is that I lost my job. Dominic keeps telling me not to worry about it, that he'll make sure I have everything I need and more. But I feel like a failure in some ways.

I worked as an officer to honor my father, and getting fired makes me feel like I let him down. However, I was fired because of my relationship with Dominic. If given the choice to do it differently, I wouldn't. What we have is special, and I won't risk it for anything in the world.

Dominic wakes me up on Christmas morning with a fresh cup of piping hot coffee. I sit up in bed and smile at him, excited about what we have in store for the day. Over the years, I've spent all of my Christmases alone, but now I have Dominic.

We drink our coffee together in bed while we discuss the plans for the day. We're going to watch Christmas movies, have a Christmas feast for dinner, and spend every moment in between wrapped in each other's arms. Unfortunately, we haven't had the time to get gifts for each other to unwrap by the tree, but Dominic's company is more than enough for me.

When we finish our coffee, Dominic leads me into the living room so we can begin our movie marathon. I decided that we should start with my favorite Christmas movie, *Miracle on 34th Street*.

I take a seat on the couch and toss a throw blanket over my legs while Dominic gets the fire going for us. I watch him quickly get it roaring before turning to the tree.

“What’s this?” he asks, reaching under it to pull out a small present.

“Did Santa visit us?” I laugh, joining him by the fire to see what it is.

“All it says is ‘For Daniella’.” He shrugs, handing it over to me. I smile and take the small package in my hand.

I untie the red velvet ribbon wrapped around it and pull the top of the box off. Inside, there’s a small box. A little black velvet box that makes me freeze in place for a moment. I slowly reach inside and pull it out, dropping the present box to the floor in front of me.

“Daniella,” Dominic whispers. I look up at him to find him kneeling on one knee in front of me. “I know we’ve only known each other for a short time, but I loved you since the moment I laid eyes on you. You’re so special to me, and I know there isn’t any other woman I want to spend the rest of my life with. Will you do me the honor of being my wife? Daniella, will you marry me?”

I stare at him in shock for a moment. I’m surprised this is happening, but my heart is soaring. The excitement rushes through my body, and I feel like I’m flying.

“Of course!” I say, crying as I wrap my arms around him. “Yes, I’ll marry you!”

He scoops me into his lap and holds me for a while before I move to kiss him. When we separate, he takes the box from my hand and slides a beautiful, sparkling diamond ring onto my finger.

“I love you,” he says with a wide smile.

I kiss him one more time and hold the side of his face with my newly adorned hand. “I love you too!”

EPILOGUE

DANIELLA

All my life, I wanted a big family. I wanted to do all the things normal families did, especially around the holidays. Now, I finally have a chance to do that. I admit I might have overdone it with the “Baby’s First Christmas” stuff this year, but I’ve waited my whole life for this.

Dominic and I sit on the ground in front of the Christmas tree, handing out gifts back and forth while we watch our son, Daniel, shake the new rattle he got excitedly. He’s on his tummy, squealing with excitement.

“I’ve never seen him so happy.” Dominic laughs while we watch him.

Daniel moves around, staring up at the beautiful twinkling lights on the Christmas tree in awe. “He likes the lights.” I giggle, grabbing some tinsel and shaking it gently on the tree so it shimmers for him.

“He’s just like his mother.” Dominic leans forward and kisses me.

We finish opening our presents and put on *Miracle on 34th Street* to watch with some hot chocolate. After last year, I decided that this would be our new tradition. Dominic and I sit on the couch with Daniel snuggled in between us, watching the movie. I’m so happy I feel like I could cry, but instead, a huge smile fills my face and I don’t let it fall for the rest of the day.

EXTENDED EPILOGUE

Ten Years Later

“**W**hy don't we just get all new ornaments?” Daniel asks me while we follow Daniella and the girls in the Christmas aisle.

I watch the love of my life walk ahead of me, admiring her from behind for a moment while she bends down to grab something from the bottom shelf.

“It's one of my old family traditions,” I explain to my son while we walk a few feet behind the girls. “We buy one ornament every year, and the rest of the decorations are old antique ones.”

“That's weird,” he mumbles before walking ahead. I laugh and shake my head.

The alarm on Daniella's phone rings and she quickly turns it off. “It's time for them to get in line to see Santa,” she says to me.

The girls cheer beside her and begin talking amongst themselves about what they're going to ask him for this year.

We hurry through the store, buy the ornament the kids all agreed on, and make our way to the Christmas display in the center of the department store.

“You guys get in line,” I tell them, ushering them to where they need to go. “Mom and I will be waiting right here.”

The kids all hurry into the line and excitedly look around at the giant candy canes and people dressed in elf costumes around us.

“You don’t think Daniel is too old for this, do you?” Daniella asks me after a minute. “He hasn’t said anything to you about Santa, has he?”

I smile at her and wrap an arm around her shoulder. I know how much the kids’ experiences with the holidays mean to her, and one of the kids not believing in Santa would break her heart.

“Not yet,” I say, easing her worries. “He still thinks Santa’s going to bring him a new gaming console.”

I lean down and whisper in her ear, quiet enough that the other parents around us can’t hear. “You know I still have the Santa hat from the park, right?”

Daniella laughs and gently nudges my arm. “Stop it!”

“How about I put it on later and you can sit on my lap?” I smile down at her and gently pat her ass.

“Unfortunately for you, it won’t be anything like it was ten years ago.” Daniella sighs, wrapping her arms around her torso. “What I wouldn’t give to have that body back.”

I shake my head while I look down at her. “Are you insane? You’re sexier now than you’ve ever been.”

“You have to say that,” she quickly replies, blushing slightly.

“I don’t *have* to say anything,” I correct her. I turn her to face me and lean down to kiss her. “I love you. More than you’ll ever know. And you carried my children and gave birth to them. You’re a mother and I love that. I especially love how it changed your body.”

She laughs softly and grazes my cheek with her finger before kissing me again. “Thank you.”

I lean closer and lower my voice. “Besides, I don’t have to worry about being as gentle now.”

She bursts out laughing and shakes her head while she blushes and hides her face. She tries to compose herself around the other parents waiting for their kids.

Daniella and I watch our kids make it through the line to have their picture taken with Santa, just like we do every year. On the drive home, I hold Daniella's hand tight in mine and smile knowing I never have to let it go.

The End. Thanks for reading!

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